

MPAH

case study series

MAPUTALAND—PONDOLAND—ALBANY HOTSPOT



Case study: Restoration of indigenous forests

Ntsubane forest complex

The Ntsubane forest complex is the largest remaining indigenous forest complex on the Wild Coast and is made up of increasingly fragmented and degraded forest clusters. The rural communities who inhabit the area rely directly on forests for a number of ecosystem services and natural resources. By encouraging authentic community participation in Participatory Forest Management Committees, the Ntsubane Living Forests Project is helping to instill a sense of ownership of the forests by communities. Communities are thus empowered to protect and restore their forests, thereby helping to achieve forest conservation and sustainable community upliftment.

Background

The Ntsubane forest complex is located in the northern part of Pondoland in the Eastern Cape Province. It is the largest remaining indigenous forest complex on the Wild Coast. The Ntsubane forests are part of the Port St Johns forests, an area identified as a Key Biodiversity Area within the Maputaland–Pondoland–Albany Hotspot. The area is made up of several increasingly fragmented forest clusters. The complex lies in the Pondoland Centre of Endemism, which is a small, sharply demarcated and geologically defined area, with high levels of tree diversity and endemism. All of the forest types in the area are threatened.

Much forest cover has been lost on the Wild Coast over the last two decades due to slash and burn agriculture. However, forest degradation is an even more severe concern, with over one third of all Wild Coast forests degraded, and this trend is increasing. The rural communities who inhabit the forests are very poor and have high rates of migration. These communities rely directly on the forests for a number of ecosystem services and natural resources, including for medicinal plants, building materials, crafts and hunting. Some of these uses are highly unsustainable. Conservation of the Ntsubane forests requires long-term investment into understanding and optimising the ecological infrastructure afforded by the forest complex, and its role in providing ecosystem services, employment, tourism and livelihoods.



Action

Ntsubane is a highly diverse forest in need of community based conservation and natural resource management. The Ntsubane Living Forests Project has identified the particularly vulnerable Ntsubane forest clusters: Goso, Kaleni, Ndengane and Mbotyi. None of the Ntsubane forests fall into any formally protected areas, except those with limited protection under the National Forest Act (84 of 1998). For this reason, there is very little knowledge about these forest clusters.

The Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) has a number of ongoing projects within the Ntsubane forests, including projects focussing on education, employment and governance. Due to the cross-sectoral nature of the work required, partnerships and collaboration between a number of non-governmental organisations, research institutions, government departments and traditional authorities have been an important foundation. The aim

is to improve community capability and leadership towards the optimal utilisation, restoration and management of the natural resources on the Wild Coast. The focus is on human capacity development, which is considered a central driver of both societal development and ecological restoration. The project has also worked to raise the profile of Ntsubane at a national level in order to secure high-level support towards co-management.

Enhanced capabilities may not lead to improved practice if there are not direct benefits to affected communities and user groups. For this reason, an integrated landscapes approach has been taken to also prioritise sustainable alternative livelihoods and formal employment. WESSA has worked on entrepreneurship development, through a forest users association. This includes training of crafters to improve craft quality, product variety and small business skills. WESSA, together with Eco-Logic, are also exploring alternative livelihood opportunities, such as tree seed oils, the use of alien plants for crafts and furniture, and co-ops for medicinal harvesting.



Participatory Forest Resource Planning

Participatory Forest Management is a requirement under the National Forests Act (84 of 1998), but it is often ineffective in practice. A pilot project was established to encourage authentic community participation in forest resource planning. The Dedeni community has been involved in developing a consolidated village-based forest use plan. A process was followed of spatial assessment of the area, with particular attention given to

degraded forests and deforestation. A number of forest zones were identified. These included special forest protected areas, forest protection zones, forest use zones and cultivated forest zones. Each of these zones was assigned management aims and permitted uses. This has been well received by the community, who despite the challenges, are supportive of the plan. WESSA is also involved in capacity development to encourage the Participatory Forest Management Committees in other communities.



Achievements

The most important achievement, which is ongoing, is the enhanced sense of ownership or responsibility that a community feels over the forest that it relies on for life and livelihoods. Communities that have this feeling are empowered to take measures to protect and restore their forests. Community rangers have proven to be the single most successful method in combating unsustainable

and illegal forest uses. This self-regulation has shown to be effective, as it gives communities the responsibility of protecting the forests. Communities are then more involved in preventing unsustainable forest use, such as illegal bark harvesting by outsiders. Community rangers are also a source of employment, addressing a dire need within the communities. Rangers are sourced from the communities, and can be involved in forest restoration projects as well as forest monitoring.

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